

"We-e-el-l" or "We'll": Children Negotiating Orthographic Features of *A Letter to Amy*

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The varying features of texts, including those in the orthography, influence readers' comprehending. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to read often and widely to offer experience with a range of texts and textual features.

Differences in oral and written language are apparent in the ways we communicate. When we hear about or experience something wonderful, such as the birth of a child or a favorite team winning a sports event, our excitement is evident in a variety of ways, including our speech (i.e., tone, volume, voice speed, intonation), facial expressions (i.e., smiles, eyes), and gestures (i.e., arm or body movements). When we try to communicate that same news in writing, we are constrained by the features of written language that translate our three-dimensional responses to two-dimensional space. Limited to exclamation points as the only punctuation that shows emotions, many writers use font types and size, capital letters, multiple exclamation points, etc., to accentuate meaning. Readers then take these cues to construct an understanding of the ideas and emotions the writer sought to convey. How, though, do young children negotiate these written language features when they read?

We became interested in this negotiation of text features as we listened to and studied the oral readings and retellings of nine readers of *A Letter to Amy* (Amy; Keats, 1968). With *Amy*, we noticed the ways these readers worked with variations in font, exaggerated spellings, punctuation, and organization of text. Though we knew research had already shown that

text features influence reading (i.e., Feathers & Arya, 2008; Golden & Gerber, 1990; Kiefer, 1995; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998; Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989), we felt a case study of the ways a group of young readers negotiated these orthographic features in a single text would be beneficial. Our study was guided by the following questions: (a) In what ways do nine second graders negotiate the orthographic features of *Amy*, as seen through their oral readings and retellings of that story? and (b) How does what we learn from this case study inform reading instruction?

The term *orthography* is derived from Greek: *ortho-* meaning correct and *-graph* meaning writing (Savage, 2001). In the *Handbook of Orthography and Literacy*, Joshi and Aaron (2006) define orthography as the "visual representation of language as conditioned by phonological, syntactic, morphological, and semantic features of the language" (p. xiii). That is, language is made visible through culturally agreed-upon symbols that account for phonic, grammar, and meaning elements.

In English orthography, symbols, marks, and graphemes represent language in a relatively durable and permanent, two-dimensional space (Goodman, 2003; Kress, 1997). Goodman (1996, 2003) takes a transactive sociopsycholinguistic stance and conceptualizes the orthographic system as the entire visual system of written language: "the physical characteristics of writing that the eye provides as signals for the brain to use in building perceptions—not only what the characters look like, but also how they are produced and how they fit together" (Goodman, 1996, p. 66). From this perspective, orthography encompasses punctuation and graphic features—such as fonts, typeface, directionality, orientation, configurations, word length, aesthetic space, design, cursive, manuscript, and nonalphabetic symbols—and letter

patterns as ways of representing meaning in texts. Readers use these features strategically to construct meaning (Nystrand & Wiemelt, 1991).

Miscue analysis and the transactive sociopsycholinguistic lens provided us a way to distinguish and study children's comprehending (i.e., their negotiation of orthographic features while reading) and their comprehension (i.e., their understanding of the text and how the orthographic features affected that). Goodman (2003) describes comprehending as "the constructive process in which readers make sense of text" (p. 31). Comprehending examines the process readers use as they transact with text, that is, how they integrate reading strategies (i.e., predicting, confirming) with language cueing systems (syntactic/grammar, semantic/meaning, pragmatic/how and why language is used, graphophonic/sound-symbols). Comprehension, on the other hand, is the end product of reading, "the reader's cumulative interpretation of the text" (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005, p. 56), which we examine through retellings.

The Study

Working with teachers at a professional development school site provided us the opportunity to study the reading processes of readers in Ms. Hall's (pseudonym) second-grade classroom. Her classroom is situated in a large metropolitan-area school on the U.S. east coast with 598 students from prekindergarten through fifth grade. Of these students, 5% were Latino, 45% white, 41% African American, 8% Asian, and 1% Native American. Thirty-two percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunch.

Ms. Hall identified nine of her students as average readers based on county and classroom assessments. These nine students provided us an intact group who were in the same school, with the same teacher, and receiving the same instruction. Seven were Caucasian, one African American, and one Hispanic. Six students were male and three were female. All spoke English proficiently and were not receiving special education services.

The language arts curriculum included the use of Open Court Phonics Kits (2000) and the *Houghton Mifflin Reading: A Legacy of Literacy* program (Houghton Mifflin, 2000). Ms. Hall reported that the second-grade teachers taught comprehension skills in the Houghton Mifflin theme book, which did not include retellings, during the daily morning 90-minute

literacy block. Spelling and Open Court lessons were taught in the afternoon. Classrooms were homogeneously grouped based on the county curriculum benchmark test scores, standardized test scores, and teacher judgment.

Before this study, the nine children had never read *Amy*, which was near their instructional level without being frustrating. The Fry (1977) readability formula put *Amy* at a beginning second-grade level, and Fountas and Pinnell (1996) have assessed it as a level K text, mid-second grade.

Amy is a realistic fiction story about Peter, who has an upcoming birthday, a familiar theme to which young children can relate. Peter writes a letter to invite Amy to his birthday party because she's a special friend. When he rushes out in a thunderstorm to mail the letter, he bumps into Amy and knocks her to the ground before he has a chance to mail the letter. Seeing Amy run home crying makes Peter upset; he wonders if Amy will come to his party and, if she does, how some of the other boys will react to a girl's presence at the party. Amy does show up at Peter's party with her parrot to wish him a happy birthday.

Keats uses action verbs, short sentences, and sentences across multiple pages to create suspense and make readers wonder whether Peter will ever be able to catch the letter, blown out of his hand by a gust of wind, before Amy sees it. Peter's fear of losing his friendship with Amy and his need to do the right thing are pervasive in the story. The drama is further enhanced through the illustrations in paper collage style.

A unique feature of the verbal text in *Amy* is the heavy use of regulatory language, that is, language used to regulate the behavior of others (Halliday, 1975). For example, Peter's mother asked Peter, "Why don't you just ask her?" and Peter said to his dog Willie, "Willie! Didn't I tell you to stay home?" Seventy percent of the sentences in the text are simple.

The verbal text includes a number of orthographic features. For example, Peter's dog's name is spelled *Willie*, an alternate to *Willy*. *Well* is spelled *We-e-el-l* to highlight the exaggerated way it was spoken. *HAAPPY BIRRRTHDAY*, *PEEETERRR* is another example of an exaggerated spelling and is written in all capital letters to indicate the volume in which it was spoken (Goodman, 1996). Words in capital letters also indicate the content of Peter's invitation letter to Amy. In this study, we examined how nine second graders transacted with such orthographic features.

Collecting and Analyzing Information From the Readings and Retellings

We followed standard miscue analysis procedures (Goodman et al., 2005) and met with the students in one-on-one sessions (researcher and student) that were audiotaped and transcribed. Because this was an assessment situation and not instructional, we did not introduce the book to the students. Our purpose was to learn how the readers negotiated texts they knew little about and the strategies they used when they encountered difficulty.

Before reading, students were told they would be asked to retell the story after reading it aloud. Each student read and retold the story. In the unaided

retelling, the students shared what they remembered without being interrupted. In the aided retelling, we asked questions but avoided giving information about the text. These questions were rephrasings of the readers' comments or general prompts, such as "Can you tell me more about...?" (Goodman et al., 2005). Even though the students were not familiar with retellings, the questions during the aided part helped draw out additional information that they remembered about the story. The protocol also included questions about personal connections to the story and opportunities for the students to share what gave them difficulty and what made them proud during their reading (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Retelling Guidelines

Reader: _____ Story: _____ I.D.: _____

School: _____ Grade/Age: _____ Date: _____

1. After reading, before the actual retelling: "How well do you think you did? Why?"

2. Unaided: "Now tell [title of story] in your own words."

3. Aided (Examples): "Tell me more about..."

"Why do you think [character] did that?"

4. Theme: "Will you tell what the story was about in a few words/sentences?"

"Why do you think the author wrote the story?"

"Did anyone in the story learn anything? What?"

5. Aesthetic-based prompts

a. "Did anything make you feel uncertain or uneasy? What?"

b. "Did anything make you feel good and happy? What?"

c. "Did [title] remind you of anything that's happened to you or something else that you have read?"

6. After the retelling

a. "Was there anything that gave you trouble while you were reading? What?"

b. "Was there anything you did while you were reading that you're proud of? What?"

c. End with positive: "I saw you [name a strength that the child showed as a reader]. Thank you for reading for me."

Analyzing Readings

Using the in-depth procedure of miscue analysis (Goodman et al., 2005), each miscue was analyzed for syntactic and semantic acceptability, meaning change, and correction. From that analysis, we determined the patterns of miscues that resulted in construction of meaning (i.e., no loss of meaning) and those that resulted in loss of meaning.

The Meaning Construction No Loss pattern includes miscues that are syntactically and semantically unacceptable and are corrected, or are syntactically and semantically acceptable and are not corrected. It represents the comprehending score, or the meaning readers construct as they are reading. Figure 2A shows examples of miscues that are unacceptable but corrected. First the reader predicts *was* for *saw*, which makes sense to that point, but he corrects because it would not make sense as he continues. He then predicts the nonword *reflention*, which he also corrects for meaning. Figure 2B provides examples of miscues that are syntactically and semantically acceptable and are not corrected. The reader omits *on* and inserts the prepositional phrase *on it* at the end of the sentence. The sentence she reads then is “Put a stamp on it,” which is a grammatical sentence that makes sense so she continues reading without correcting.

These examples reveal the readers’ comprehending (i.e., their focus on making sense during reading).

The Meaning Construction Loss pattern reflects miscues that are syntactically and semantically unacceptable and are not corrected. In Figure 2C, for example, the reader predicts and substitutes the nonword *fowled* for *folded* and then *quiet* for *quite*, neither of which makes sense and is acceptable. He continues reading without correcting the miscues, which results in a loss of meaning.

We also analyzed miscues for the relationship between readers’ meaning-making strategies while they read and orthographic features of the text. To do this, we examined the sections of text containing specific orthographic features to see whether the readers miscued in those places, the types of miscues they made (i.e., substitutions, omissions, etc.), and whether they corrected the miscues. In addition, we calculated the number of miscues each student made per hundred words. All coding was completed by two of the three researchers and an inter-rater reliability of 0.95 was established.

Analyzing Retellings

We scored each plot episode on a scale of 0–3 (see Figure 3). A score of 0 was given if the episode was

Figure 2
Examples of Types of Miscues

Meaning Construction No Loss pattern

A. Syntactically and semantically unacceptable miscues that are corrected

He ^cwas ^c\$ reflention
He saw his reflection in the street.

B. Syntactically and semantically acceptable miscues that are not corrected

“Put ^{on it} ~~on~~ a stamp.”

Meaning Construction Loss pattern

C. Syntactically and semantically unacceptable miscues that are not corrected

\$ fowled quiet
He folded the letter quite a few times,

Note. Miscue markings: Substitutions are written above the text; omissions are circled; \$ denotes a nonword; c denotes a correction.

Figure 3
Retelling Guide for *A Letter to Amy*

- 0—No mention of the episode
1—Mentions an item or two from the episode, no elaboration
2—Talks about several major parts of the episode
3—Gives detail and description about the episode with all/most major parts

Episode 1 [Peter writes Amy, wants to mail it, raincoat]	Peter writes Amy a letter to invite her to his birthday party on Saturday. His mother wonders why he doesn't ask her, since he didn't write to anyone else. Peter says this way it's special. He wants to mail the letter himself. His mother reminds him to put down when the party starts and Peter writes that on the back of the envelope. She reminds him not to forget the stamp and also tells him to wear the raincoat. Peter tells his dog Willie to stay home.	0 1 2 3
Episode 2 [sees Pepe not Amy, wind blows letter, can't catch it]	On his way to the mailbox, Peter sees dark clouds. He looks up at Amy's window, but only Pepe, her parrot, is there. Peter sees Willie and says he told him (Willie) to stay home. As he is wondering what boys will say about his inviting a girl to the party, a strong wind blows the letter out of his hand. Peter starts chasing the letter. It flies high into the air, skips across a hopscotch game, and blows this way and that, but Peter can't catch it. It starts to rain.	0 1 2 3
Episode 3 [Peter sees Amy, bumps into her, she runs away crying]	Peter sees Amy. The letter is flying right toward her. Peter doesn't want Amy to see the letter now because he wants to surprise her. Peter and Amy both run toward the letter. Peter bumps into Amy, but he is able to catch the letter and put it in the mailbox before she realizes that the letter is for her. Amy runs away crying. Peter doesn't think that Amy will come to his party and feels sad. When Peter gets home, his mother asks him if he mailed the letter and Peter sadly says yes.	0 1 2 3
Episode 4 [Amy comes, Peter makes a wish, blows out candles]	On Saturday, everyone arrives but Amy. Peter wants to wait with the cake, but the boys want it now. Amy comes to the party with her parrot and says, "Happy Birthday, Peter." Peter's mother brings the cake with the candles lit. Peter makes a wish and blows out all the candles at once.	0 1 2 3

not mentioned, a score of 1 was given if the student gave some but not all key information, and a score of 2 was given if the student included all of the main parts of the episode. To get a score of 3, the student needed to elaborate with rich details. We calculated the number of points earned over the total possible points to gain a percentage score. This gave us a comprehension score that indicated what the reader chose to share with us from the content of the story. For example, a score of 2 on each of the 4 episodes would be 8 points out of the possible 12, or 75%. This

score would indicate that the student included the main parts of each episode.

Through qualitative analysis of the retellings, we examined text-implicit information the students shared, as well as aesthetic responses and personal connections (Martens, Wilson, & Arya, 2007). Retellings were coded by at least two researchers, and an inter-rater reliability of 0.95 was established. To study the relationship of the retellings to orthographic features in the text, we compared miscues related to those features with what the readers shared about that portion of the story.

The Information Gathered

Comprehending

Table 1 contains miscue and retelling data for the nine readers (all student names are pseudonyms). Their miscues per hundred words (MPHW) ranged from 3 to 11 with a mean of 6. The mean comprehending scores, indicating the meaning the students constructed while reading, shown in the Meaning Construction No Loss score is 47%. The mean for the Meaning Construction Loss miscues (i.e., those miscues that did not make sense in the story) is 38%. Almost half their miscues made sense in the context of the story and just over a third did not. Examining the miscues that resulted in a loss of meaning and analyzing how and why the readers may have made those miscues reveals a complex relationship between the orthographic system and the syntactic and semantic systems and how they influence readers' comprehending.

Figure 4 provides two examples of low-quality substitutions, each made by seven of the nine readers. These lines are on page 2 of the story. Peter has just shared with his mother that he is going to write a

letter to Amy to invite her to his birthday party and is ready to begin. *Peter started* is a logical prediction—based on syntactic, semantic, and graphic (orthography) and sound similarities—but it doesn't make sense in the complete text. Since Peter's mother questioned why he was writing to Amy when he hadn't written to anyone else, Peter responded by exaggerating his pronunciation of *Well* to *We-e-el-l* (see Line 0206). Seven of the nine students substituted the word *We'll* for *We-e-el-l*, and none who miscued here corrected it. Based on their experience with reading and language, the students know that *We'll* is a syntactically and semantically acceptable way to begin a sentence and that *We'll* and *Well* also look and sound similar. However, while the students very likely have heard pronunciations like that in oral language, and even spoken that way themselves, they may be less familiar with how exaggerations are represented in written language.

Figure 5 provides another example of the complexity of the relationship between the orthographic, syntactic, and semantic systems and how these influence readers' comprehending. Willie is Peter's dog and his name appears twice in the story on

Table 1
Miscue Analysis Scores and Retelling Scores for *A Letter to Amy*

	MPHW	MnCon No Loss	MnCon Loss	Graph High	Sound High	Retell
Aaron	7	50	39	78	63	67
Brad	3	29	57	100	85	75
Donald	5	52	22	72	61	50
Ethan	11	42	36	62	57	50
George	4	57	30	63	58	58
Jeremy	3	50	36	78	67	50
Kerry	5	56	37	86	67	42
Renee	5	52	37	86	73	58
Tanya	8	38	44	82	64	58
Means	6	47	38	79	66	56

Note. MPHW = Miscues per hundred words, MnCon No Loss = Meaning Construction No Loss (comprehending score), MnCon Loss = Meaning Construction Loss, Graph = Graphic similarity, Sound = Sound similarity.

Figure 4
Examples of Low-Quality Substitutions Resulting in Meaning Loss

0205	^{started} Peter stared at the sheet of paper for a while and said,
0206	^{We'll} "We-e-el-l, this way it's sort of special."

Note. Miscue markings: Substitutions are written above the text.

Figure 5
Substitutions of *While* for *Willie*, Resulting in Meaning Loss

0314	He put it on and said, "It looks like rain.
0315	^{while} You'd better stay in, Willie."
0316	and ran out to mail his letter....
0607	^{While} "Willie!" Didn't I tell you to stay home?

Note. Miscue markings: Omissions are circled; substitutions are written above the text.

consecutive pages of text with illustrations on the pages between them. In Line 0315, *Willie* is the last word on the line, and in Line 0607, it is the first. Six students miscued on *Willie* in Line 0315, five of them substituting *while*. In Line 0607, four students miscued on *Willie*, three again substituting *while*. (The student who miscued both times, but did not substitute *while*, substituted *Why*lie and *why*, respectively, both of which have /i/ like *while*.)

We hypothesize that the combination of the alternate spelling of *Willie* (compared with Willy) and the placement of *Willie* at the end and beginning of the lines may have influenced these students' miscues. For example, in Line 0315, the substitution of *while* for *Willie* to be You'd better stay in *while*... is a logical prediction. It would be interesting to see if the students made the same miscue had the sentence

Figure 6
Examples of Complex Miscues Resulting in Meaning Loss

0305	WILL YOU PLEASE COME
0306	TO MY BIRTHDAY PARTY. PETER.

Note. Miscue markings: Substitutions are written above the text.

continued on that line instead of breaking to the next line. In Line 0607, six lines later on the next page, three of the five students again substituted *while* to begin the line. These examples raise the possibility that the orthographic spelling patterns and line breaks may have influenced the students' predictions and comprehending.

A final example is seen in Peter's letter to Amy, written in all capital letters. Five of the nine students made the complex miscues involving punctuation in Figure 6. English conventions require a question mark after *WILL YOU PLEASE COME TO MY BIRTHDAY PARTY*. As experienced speakers of English, the students, as indicated by their intonation when they read, eliminated the two periods—one after the word *PARTY* and the other after the word *PETER*—and included Peter as the addressee of the questions. Since Peter is doing the inviting, the miscues result in a major change in meaning. Two additional lines are also written in all capital letters: *IT IS THIS SATURDAY AT 2* (Line 0309) and *HAAPPY BIRRRTHDAY, PEEETERRR!* (Line 2602). However, no students miscued on these two lines (even with the exaggerated spellings in Line 2602).

As Figures 4–6 show, orthographic features of the text influenced the students' miscues and thus their comprehending as they read. Thus, in answer to part of our first question for this study regarding the ways readers negotiate the orthographic features as shown in their oral reading, we found that syntactic structures, exaggerated spellings, and unexpected punctuation, among other features, affected the students' comprehending, as shown by multiple students making identical miscues. To learn how the students' miscues on the orthographic features relate to their comprehension, we analyzed their retellings.

Comprehension

Though the students found *Amy* challenging to read, as shown in their comprehending scores, their retelling scores are moderate to high. As seen in Table 1, the retelling scores range from 42% to 75% with a mean of 56%. All of the students except one understood and were able to retell half or more than half of the explicitly stated information in the text.

Most of the students gave rich details about episodes 3 and 4 (see Table 2), the last two that deal with Peter bumping into Amy as he is getting ready to mail the letter and the actual birthday party. These episodes are dramatic and full of emotions. Six of the nine readers talked about Amy crying and two mentioned Peter being sad (episode 3). Renee captured most of these elements in her retelling when she said the following:

When he [Peter] walked to put it in the mailbox, it flew away and he was catching it everywhere but he couldn't and Amy came and...Amy and the boy, they bumped into each other and the boy got the letter. And then he put it in the mailbox and, um...Amy went home crying. And then on his birthday he was really sad that she wouldn't come and then he, um, heard the door open and it was Amy, so then they...he made a wish.

Three students included that Peter thought the boys would laugh at him for inviting a girl. Donald alluded to this problem by saying that the boys "didn't really wanna see a girl at the party." Renee said, "It

was about this kid [who] wanted to get this girl over to his party on Saturday, but he thought the boys would laugh at him." The children seemed to identify with the characters and what they were feeling, even to the point of taking care to explain motive, such as when Aaron said that Peter "didn't purposely make Amy slip and fall...he just grabbed it [the letter] in the water...she slipped...."

Most of the students could relate to having a birthday party (episode 4) filled with surprises, cake, ice cream, and wishes. Seven of the readers included details from the birthday party, such as "blow out the candles and wish for something, then one person told him to wish for a truck full of ice cream and a store full of candy" (George). Two of the students made connections to their own negative experiences with birthday parties: "I didn't have no birthday parties...only with my parents, that's all" (Jeremy); "When at kindergarten, someone was having their birthday party and they invited, like, everyone except, like, four kids and...one was me" (Donald).

In examining students' retellings, we found that their background knowledge and experiences helped them comprehend the text despite the prevalence of a number of unique orthographic features in *Amy* that affected their comprehending. Even though episodes 1 and 2—which include examples of students' miscues related to the orthographic features shown in Figures 2, 4, and 5—have the lowest retelling means (1.4; see Table 2), all of the students

Table 2
Retelling Scores by Episode in *A Letter to Amy*

	Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4
Aaron	1	2	3	2
Brad	2	1	3	3
Donald	1	1	2	2
Ethan	1	1	2	2
George	1	2	1	3
Jeremy	2	2	1	1
Kerry	1	1	1	2
Renee	1	2	2	2
Tanya	2	1	2	2
Means	1.4	1.4	1.9	2.1

retold something from those episodes. In fact, none of the students received 0 for any of the plot episodes (Figure 3 and Table 2), indicating that they were able to retell at least some information about each of the episodes in the story.

We found indications that some orthographic features may impact retellings by making the text memorable. For example, three children included the detail of the day and time of Peter's party, which is printed

in all capital letters in the text: "WILL YOU PLEASE COME TO MY BIRTHDAY PARTY. PETER...IT IS THIS SATURDAY AT 2" (Lines 0305–0306 and 0309). In her retelling, Taylor said, "Come to my party at Saturday at 2 o'clock p.m. or a.m." This is her whole unaided retelling, indicating this information holds significance for her. Jeremy prioritized this part of the text by starting his retelling with "Will you come to my birthday party? It's at my house. It's this Saturday at 2 o'clock...." The use of

capitals draws attention to the detail of the day and time of Peter's party.

From the retellings, we learn that the children focused on the last two episodes. Characters' feelings and the relationships between characters emerged as important to these readers, as did the action, including events at the birthday party. The use of capital letters in the text seems to aid comprehension; however, other orthographic features that triggered miscues have less impact on the retellings.

Learnings and Implications for Reading Instruction

This study shows that orthographic features of text, including spelling, line breaks, fonts, and so forth, influence readers' comprehending but, in the case of these readers and Amy, not necessarily comprehension. With Amy, different features of the verbal text contribute to lower comprehending scores due to more miscues resulting in a loss of meaning. For example, sentences spread across multiple lines and line breaks

that are abrupt and not intuitive make it more difficult for the children to predict the syntax. Perera (1984) states that "reading is likely to be harder when the grammatical structure of a sentence is not easy to predict...and...when a sentence does not divide into optimal segments for processing" (p. 287). Despite these difficulties, the students' comprehension is not negatively impacted by orthographic features; however, features such as use of all capital letters seem to draw readers' attention and are included in the retellings.

This study supports research showing that how readers "sound" when they read—that is, the smoothness of "flow" (Flurkey, 2002)—is not a sure indication that readers will have stronger or weaker comprehension. Flurkey's research shows that flow varies paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence. Sometimes, as readers construct meaning, they do not sound fluent, yet comprehension is not disrupted (Goodman et al., 2005). Our study shows how the smoothness and accuracy (or lack of these qualities) reflects their work in building understanding of the text and its content during the transaction. For example, Brad, who read accurately (3 MPHW) but lacked flow in his reading (comprehending score of 29%), still constructed meaning, as shown in his high comprehension score (75%). On the other hand, Ethan, with the highest MPHW (11) and an average comprehending score (42%), also was able to comprehend the text adequately (50%). The students' familiarity with friendships and birthday parties provided the support the readers needed to construct meaning in spite of challenges offered in the text.

A major implication of our findings is that features of texts, including those in the orthography, influence readers' comprehending. The lower comprehending scores are at least in part the result of students' miscues on text with unique orthographic features. The fact that multiple students make identical miscues in the same places supports miscue analysis research that shows that texts can influence students' reading (Goodman et al., 2005). When evaluating texts for use in assessments or instruction, an examination of the orthographic features and how those features might influence readers' comprehending is a critical consideration. We are by no means suggesting that texts with such features should be avoided, only that teachers need to be aware of the role orthographic features play in students' reading.

Texts with unusual orthographic features provide rich opportunities for discussions. Although teachers

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can draw attention to such features when introducing a story, it is effective to see whether students make observations or comments regarding these features on which the teacher can then build. Teachers can stimulate further discussion with questions, such as, Why do you think the author used [orthographic feature]? How did this feature add to the meaning of the written text? Would the meaning have been different if the text were written like the rest of the text and without the feature? Why do you think that? Another book that can be used to generate such discussions is *Precious and the Boo Hag* by Patricia C. McKissack and Onawumi Jean Moss, which includes text bubbles, text wrapped around a frame of the page, and different fonts.

While leveling schemes for texts, such as those provided by textbook publishers (i.e., Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, and Houghton Mifflin, 2000), are helpful for matching students to books, we have found that not all books in any particular level are “equal.” Books at the same level may have unique fonts, text and illustration placements, and syntactic differences that require consideration by both the teacher and the students.

Finally, this case study highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities to read often and widely to have experience with a range of texts (Krashen, 2004; Meek, 1988; Mooney, 2004). It is through reading widely that students gain experience with a variety of orthographic features and the diverse ways meaning is represented in print. Because this was a case study of one book, further research is needed in this area that will inform us about how readers navigate texts with unique orthographic features.

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